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ABSTRACT

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), as a corporate affiliate of the American Association for Counseling and Development, is the accrediting agency for the world's largest association for counseling. CACREP has been in consultation with the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) staff and has been in the process of gaining recognition status from COPA. Other agencies which accredit counselor education programs include the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), American Psychological Association (APA), the National Council on Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE), and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT). Of all of these agencies, only CACREP addresses the needs of counseling at both the doctoral and the master's degree levels and in more than one type of setting or clientele. CACREP may be the best choice for the accreditation of counselor education programs for clarity of purpose; scope of coverage; quality of process; and advantages to graduates, students, and programs. Dual accreditation at the doctoral level by APA and CACREP of the same programs is not possible. University educators with doctoral programs must decide who it is that they are best able to prepare (counselor educators and supervisors or psychologists). Having made this decision, they must identify their programs by the appropriate title and go on to prepare students for serving their clients and their profession. (NB)

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Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) or APA Doctoral Accreditation ?

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I wish to provide a brief record of the development and purpose of our national accrediting body. I will conclude by addressing the question of which accrediting body a counselor education program should chose to help it in its process of self-examination. Because we find growing interest by institutions and their staff in the work of CACREP, I think a short history may be a fitting foundation to the conclusions portion of this presentation.

CACREP and its Mission

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is a Corporate Affiliate of the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD). As such, it is the accrediting agency for the world's largest association for counseling. In keeping with its desire to be a responsible partner in the accrediting community, since its inception, its leadership has been in consultation with the staff of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) and has been in the process of gaining recognition status from COPA. This recognition is anticipated in the near future. Likewise, there are continuing contacts and consultation with related accrediting agencies such as the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE). The history of commitment to accreditation has been long and substantive by AACD and its respective divisions.

Since 1958, the number of counselor education programs has increased substantially. In addition, many colleges and universities offered courses in counseling at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. With the adoption of Standards, however, both during the 1960's and in a broadened, refined form in the early 1970's, voluntary and developmental self-evaluation of counselor education programs was an interest of only a modest number of programs. The new thrust of the counselor educators and supervisors (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision) in the late 1970's to have the Standards "implemented" as a responsible commitment to professionalism was the turning point in accreditation for counselor education.

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To **students**, accreditation provides:

a. An assurance that the educational activities of an accredited institution or program have been found to be satisfactory, and therefore meet the needs of students;

b. Assistance in the transfer of credits between institutions or in the admission of students to advanced degrees, through the general acceptance of credits among accredited institutions when the performance of the student has been satisfactory and the credits to be transferred are appropriate to the receiving institution;

c. A prerequisite in many cases for entering a profession.

Institutions of higher education benefit from accreditation through:

a. The stimulus provided for self-evaluation and self-directed institutional and program improvement;

b. The strengthening of institutional and program self-evaluation by the review and counsel provided through the accrediting body;

c. The application of criteria of accrediting bodies, generally accepted throughout higher education, which help guard against external encroachments harmful to institutional or program quality by providing benchmarks independent of forces that might impinge on individual institutions;

d. The enhancing of the reputation of an accredited institution or program because of public regard for accreditation;

e. The use of accreditation as one means by which an institution can gain eligibility for the participation of itself and its students in certain programs of governmental aid to postsecondary education; accreditation is also usually relied upon by private foundations as a highly desirable indicator of institutional and program quality.

Accreditation serves **the professions** by:

a. Providing a means for the participation of practitioners in setting the requirements for preparation to enter the professions;

b. Contributing to the unity of the professions by bringing together practitioners, teachers and students

in an activity directed at improving professional preparation and professional practice.

(Excerpts from the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation, Policy Statement on the Role and Value of Accreditation, Adopted April 15, 1982.)

To be accredited by the CACREP Council includes the following:

1. A program is identified by a title which includes counseling or a closely related field whose major focus is the development of individuals and groups. More specifically, the scope of CACREP includes:

   a. Entry level Master's Degree programs in:

      1). Counseling in the Community and Other Agency Settings (July, 1988 this will become Community Counseling and Mental Health Counseling will be listed separately)

      2). School Counseling

      3). Student Personnel Services in Higher Education (July, 1988 this will be retitled, Student Affairs in Higher Education)

   b. Doctoral degree programs in Counselor Education and Supervision

2. The program is located in and supported by an educational institution accredited by one of six regional accrediting bodies recognized by COPA.

3. The institution staff has completed a thorough self-study and voluntarily applied for a verification of its programs as having met or exceeded national standards. This review process has required months of preparation involving faculty, students, administrators, graduates, employers, clinical supervisors and others who influence or are influenced by this program. The site visit team has conducted an indepth verification of the fact that standards have been met or exceeded. Verification by documentation, however, is the responsibility of the institutional staff in its self-study report.

4. The program was thoroughly reviewed by the Council and determined to have met or exceeded the Standards.

In summary, accreditation applies to educational institutions and programs. Its goal is to assure quality of education while supporting the public trust that better education will result in better services to the community.

Implicit in the process of accreditation is not only the attainment of a goal or status but rather a commitment to the continual striving for excellence in the preparation of future practitioners. Sustaining the accreditation status becomes one goal of these programs. Regular program review, attention to measures of outcome and external verification are among the hallmarks of accreditation. Therein lies the long term benefit of accreditation. Accountability is real and yet realistic.

Program accreditation remains voluntary, of course. The long standing concern of ACES and the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD) for a high quality of professional services to the public served by its members is recognition of an important social obligation. The program approval process is a joint one between the accrediting body and the faculty and administration of the institution's program under review. By giving official sanction to this process, the profession hopes to encourage more institutions to follow the good example of the pioneers and benefit not only others, but the institutions themselves in their goal toward excellence.

Process and Product

The self-study involves both a process and product. The process is one which can and should lead to insights, affirmations, and opportunities for innovation and change which enhance programs of preparation. This is a dynamic, evolutionary process which is ongoing and creative. The product is tantamont to a representative sample of the program as it exists at a moment in time. In the true spirit of accreditation self-analysis, program staff are encouraged to approach the tasks in an open, scientifically minded way with the excitement of anticipating new discoveries.

As a voluntary activity, it should represent an attitude and philosophy which is fundamentally attuned to excellence as an outcome of the program activities. Responsibility for assuring excellence rests with the program staff. Therefore, in both the process and development of the self-study report, the staff have the responsibility to insure that representatives of students, graduates, administrators, clinical supervisors, cognate instructors and employers are given an opportunity to be involved. Likewise, they should insure that all needed data and documentation are studied and weighed in the decision to seek accreditation status. Administrative support and concurrence are essential to a successful outcome. In short, it is a deliberate and substantive process requiring a fundamental resolve to comply with both the spirit and official requirements of the self-study process.

In Conclusion: Whither Thou Goest?

The question of whether an institution should pursue accreditation from one accrediting body or another can be one of parsimony and mission. There are five different agencies which accredit counselor education programs. They are:

Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE)

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

American Psychological Association (APA)

American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy (AAMFT)

Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

Of these agencies, AAMFT is not recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Education (COPA) and has not been a major accrediting body in the past. There has been some evidence that programs are increasingly interested in some form of accreditation in this area.

The APA is exclusively interested in the preparation of psychologists and the accreditation of doctoral programs only.

The NCATE accreditation is fundamentally teacher education oriented and has only recently begun to accomodate for specialties such as school counseling. The success of these efforts remains to be seen. They have been unsatisfactory in the past.

CORE is exclusively concerned with rehabilitation counselor preparation. With COPA's encouragement and interest, CACREP and CORE recently conducted a joint visit quite successfully. Even closer working relationships are expected in the future.

Of all these bodies, CACREP alone addresses the needs of counseling at both the doctoral and Masters degree levels and in more than one type of setting or clientele. Department chairs, deans and presidents around the country tell us that they desire fewer accrediting teams, less regulation by professional bodies and more interest in outcome measures of graduate education. Since its inception, CACREP has worked effectively to meet these desires.

If you prepare psychologists, then, APA is your most appropriate accrediting agency. If you prepare marriage and family therapists and your graduates are not concerned that they may be disadvantaged with some credentialing bodies, then AAMFT may be

your choice. If you prepare only school counselors and your graduates do not mind waiting longer to be eligible for some state and national credentials, then NCATE's accreditation of your college of education may cover you. If your institution prepares rehabilitation and other types of counselors, you may wish to explore a joint effort between CACREP and CORE.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that accreditation is a vital part of our commitment to both the profession and those whom we serve. Unlike credentialing, it is not and should not be a marketplace issue for limiting who and how many persons enter the field.

I believe that CACREP is the best choice for the accreditation of counselor education programs for clarity of purpose, scope of coverage, quality of process and advantages to graduates as well as students and program. It does not and will not duplicate the efforts of other COPA recognized bodies. In the area of school counselor preparation, our Standards, processes and decision rendering mechanism are substantially different from NCATE. We continue to be open to working with NCATE should they ever desire our assistance. In the meantime, we are an alternative to NCATE that the vast majority of programs choose whenever we are invited to accredit their counselor education programs.

With respect to dual accreditation at the doctoral level by APA and CACREP of essentially the same programs at an institution, this is not possible now nor will it be in the future. The agencies are by definition and scope preparing related but different professionals. This is by deliberate design and it is the only viable position for either agency to maintain within the accreditation community or higher education. In point of fact, counselors at both the doctoral and Master's level are increasingly able to function without concern for violation of psychologists' legislation. They also are earning the same or better privileges in practice which some have cited in the past as a rationale for dual credentialing.

I believe that university educators with doctoral programs must decide who it is that they are best able to prepare i.e., counselor educators and supervisors or psychologists. They need to identify their programs by the appropriate title, and then, get on with doing the best job that they can with preparing students for serving their clients and the profession.

Originally prepared as a presentation at the New Orleans AACD Convention Program addressing this topic (April, 1987)